

**Approved Summary of
Meeting of the Taunton Bay Advisory Group
6 PM Tuesday September 18th
Hancock Town Office
Co-Facilitated by Ron Beard and Sherman Hoyt
University of Maine Cooperative Extension Service**

Present: Ron Beard, Antonio Blasi, Mike Briggs, Frank Dorsey, Shep Erhart, Norman Hodgkins, Sherman Hoyt, Lee Hudson, Doug Kimmel, Slade Moore, Steve Perrin, John Sowles, and Les Stratton.

Roles of Facilitator and DMR

After brief introductions and reintroductions, we reviewed and clarified roles of the DMR and facilitator(s). John reported that Dana Smith will represent Franklin in the future but had a conflict tonight. Neither Helen nor Tom Gordon can attend Tuesday evenings. He suggested that we seek alternate representation for Sullivan and lobstering to recommend to his Commissioner. There may be an existing advisor adequately familiar with lobstering.

To the extent affordable, DMR will provide technical resources, laws, unpublished data and internal reports, assessments, maps, and modest funds through the Maine Coastal Program. John will continue to record meeting summaries but welcomes others to give it a try.

Facilitators are to ensure that meetings are productive, that different points of views are represented by making sure people are listening, discussion is civil and that people have fair opportunity to talk. Facilitators will remain neutral and be liaison between the convenor (Senator Damon) as needed. Ron will be phasing out after this meeting but available if needed. Sherman will be responsible mailings and securing venues. A cooperative agreement is being drawn up between DMR and the University of Maine Cooperative Extension to support the facilitator through July 2008.

Confirmation of goals and purpose

Slade asked if it might be wise to draw up a mission statement to guide the group. He saw the benefit in having some overarching principles to pay attention to throughout the process. Otherwise, with such a diverse group with diverse interests, when things get challenging, our focus can be lost. It is good to have a touchstone as a reference to remind us of the overall group goal.

Lee proposed that the mission advocate for a balance of clean water, green shores, and jobs. She then handed out Marine Stewardship Council's, the Stonington Fisheries Alliance, and Maine's Bay Management principles for ideas.

Frank asked for clarification of our responsibility to report to the Commissioner. John assured the group that there is no format or schedule and that it is entirely up to the Advisory Group to decide. There seemed to be consensus that an informal face to face oral "report" would be best rather than investing in laborious written reports.

Norman asked how the Stonington Fisheries Alliance principles fit with Taunton Bay? He noted that the scales and goals are very different. Ron offered that the Alliance is just an example, not directly transferable, but contains some good working language. Norman noted that much of the Alliance was modeled after Canada and we probably shouldn't base our principles on those since they effectively killed their worm market through unintended consequences of management despite the fact there are plenty of worms.

Steve offered a granite cutter analogy, that we should look for a fault line of common interest in bay and base our principles on those. Keeping it simple versus complicated is more likely to succeed.

Doug was concerned that while a mission statement is important, we could spend a long time working it up at the expense of doing something for the bay. He felt that the strawman language in the Legislative report was a good beginning point to amend later, if needed.

Shep saw a mission statement process valuable in building connections within group. Lee reminded us that since the Advisory Group will be advising DMR, it would be helpful to have some basis to explain rationale for that advice.

Slade noted two different discussions going on, for example, some are asking for goals while others are asking for principles, deep beliefs.

Ron suggested that a third of the group were not engaged in this discussion at all while others seem to have energy. He suggested that a subgroup report back to the larger group.

Steve concluded that what is contained in the Legislative Report is good enough but wants to tweek whenever needed.

Action Item - Lee and Slade to bring something back to group on mission and principles.

Communications Policy - Public and media

Discussion moved to how we record meetings and how we share our proceedings with the general public.

How does the group wish minutes be kept? Lee recalls the Aquaculture Task Force minutes and liked attribution of who said what. Shep liked the level of detail of the first meeting's minutes for those not present. Many recommended this level of detail continue, including attribution of comments by name. However, the group was not enthusiastic about actively publicizing comments by name and decided on an abridged version to be made available via the web.

The subject of keeping an annotated bibliography of material reviewed by the group came up. Frank offered to maintain paper trail of information presented and reviewed at our meetings.

Steve noted that one can collect references, galore, to support just about all positions on any one issue. This has the potential of becoming a can of worms. The consensus was that we track only those items brought before the Advisory Group and not attempt to compile topical bibliographies.

Frank suggested that we may need to review any and all our policies as new members come onboard and hence keeping this record is important.

GROUND RULES

Sherman referred to the groundrules agreed to at the last meeting and asked if there were question or concerns. There were none.

CONSENSUS

All agreed that unanimous agreement is preferred but if that is not achieved, there needs to be an outlet to express minority views through one or more minority reports.

QUORUM

Frank was concerned that special meetings could be called by a small group of advisors and set policy under the guise of an official meeting when, in fact, had there been larger representation, the policy might have been different. Ron proposed that a set of criteria be developed to ensure this is avoided. He proposed that for a meeting to be official, there be required

- a week notice of the meeting

- an agenda

- that DMR, a facilitator and a minimum of 8 TBAG members be present.

The group agreed this would be a good policy.

PARTICIPATION

Discussion on whether and how outside public individuals could participate followed. Frank offered that there were two flavors of outside participants; observers and invited experts. Shep suggest that if an observer comes, he/she should have some opportunity to comment but generally not participate in the overall discussion. Les proposed that outside comments be heard at end of each meeting to give the public the opportunity to speak. The group agreed that there should be an opportunity for public input at both the beginning and end of each meeting. The group also agreed that an individual might participate if he/she had some expert knowledge that bore on a specific topic if the Advisory Group so chose. Invited experts would be identified on the agenda and participate in discussion of the respective agenda item.

Ron suggested we add something to ground rules about how public interacts with Advisory Group.

Action Item - Sherman to add how public interacts with Advisory Group to ground rules.

COMMUNICATION WITH PUBLIC

Given that we will produce minutes and records, how do we want to make these available to the public.

Frank noted that we had two types of minutes - drafts subject to review and the final approved minutes. Draft minutes are draft and should not be circulated beyond the group. John noted that everything he produces is publicly available on request but that we do not have to actively advertise their availability. The consensus was that anyone can quote from approved minutes. Approved minutes may be circulated but since they contain detail that some were uncomfortable with, e.g. names of speakers, Frank suggested an abridged version could be posted on the web.

Steve recommended that decisions be included in the abridge version but not the steps leading to them. But we also need to reference the data on which decision is based and be clear about definitions and terminology.

Action Item - John to work with Frank and Lee on a web version of minutes.

On the subject of releasing information, the issue of confidentiality arose. Frank suggested that confidential information could be handled through an executive session. Steve asks what is included under the definition of confidential.

Frank noted that, for example, if the group secured a grant to hire a person, then at least personnel matters would be confidential.

Action Item - John to report on the State's legal coverage to protect confidentiality.

Before moving on to the workplan. Sherm noted some advisors' discomfort that the public might be associated this Advisory Group with other NGO (non-governmental organization) activity, whether environmental, commercial, or government. John tried to assure the group that they were selected to advise his Commissioner on how the State of Maine will manage Taunton Bay. Advisors were selected based on their knowledge and expertise. Collectively, they represent a diversity of opinions and knowledge and not a single or narrow interest. We need to think about how to represent this to public to avoid misperceptions.

Shep noted that credibility is created by our process and the decisions we make. It is what we do that counts. Publication of meeting proceedings and making them available to the public can also help. Having a workplan and making it publically available should also help. Les was concerned that not all players are present (ie. musselers). Ultimately, the group agreed that the solution to avoiding misperceptions and misrepresentation is through demonstrated performance.

Action Item - Frank will develop a matrix showing the diverse interests and knowledge to show both the breadth of representation as well as the group's limitations.

Strawman Workplan

John walked the group through the draft workplan rationale. He explained why, in his mind, drag harvest management was highest priority. He emphasized that while we all might like a faster pace, this is a long term commitment that will take time and a lot of effort. Trying to do too much in short order is not practical considering resources available.

Frank requested that horseshoe crab work be moved up earlier to allow time to secure funding and continue the time series by May.

Lee wants to see other resource protection measures stepped up and especially want dragging topics to be more comprehensive and include dragging for other species such as urchins and scallops. Slade suggested that we look at factors other than habitat damage. He proposed that urchin and scallop populations appear to be down for several reasons, not just dragging, and we should add restoring those populations to the drag plan. Doug noted that the moratorium was put in for one purpose, to keep big draggers out, but here we have an opportunity to protect the resource more comprehensively.

Shep liked the way the workplan scheduled small chunks at time and contained a preview of the upcoming issue. But he was not sure if we can actually follow this when the next new big issue arises that might be a higher priority. He wants this plan to be open to change at anytime. For example, we might want to tackle water quality science earlier in order to get ready to propose changes in management.

There was general agreement that dragging was the top priority, given the expiration of the drag moratorium. But dragging is only one piece of other issues such as depression of scallop and urchin populations. Slade would like to get some assessment of scallops and urchins in bay. The group asked that urchins and scallops be added to the science list.

Steve wants to add sediment and mud, erosion etc. to monitoring. He also would like public trust to be defined so everyone knows what is and is not included.

John reminded the group that he and the DMR are very comfortable with the dragging plan proposed in the Legislative report. If the group is uncomfortable with the proposal, then we must offer an alternative. But he pointed out that if the group is sufficiently comfortable, then the group could work on some of these other projects sooner rather than later. Steve thought existing proposal disregarded impacts to seals, eelgrass, and horseshoecrabs. John said he considered all these and can share his rationale in more detail at the next meeting.

Action Item - John to provide definition of public trust.

Action Item – John to revise workplan.

Next meeting

The group decided to meet monthly and settled on the third Tuesday of month. October 16th will be next meeting (low tide at 8:30). Due to the Thanksgiving holiday, the November meeting will be held Tuesday, November 27th (negative low tide at 6:30). Commissioner Lapointe is tentatively scheduled to attend the November meeting.

Ron asked how the meeting went. Everyone seemed ok with this meeting. with Steve adding that the next one could be tough. So far we've just been building up.